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ABSTRACT

Within the context of a discussion of the development of adult education programs in community colleges, this paper focuses on the noncredit programming in the San Francisco Community College District (SFCCD) and the threats to those activities posed by recent funding reductions. First, the paper reviews the long history of adult education, highlighting the historical events contributing to its development and expansion, the negative and inaccurate perceptions of adult education held by many oriented to more traditional educational modes, and the unique features of the growing adult education movement (e.g., its use of facilities not specifically designed for education; and its suitability as a resource for activities for the physically disabled, social welfare clients, and other human services recipients). The paper focuses then on the new breed of educator who emerged to fill the instructional gaps left by traditional education. Next, the Truman Commission on Higher Education's impact on adult education and the community college movement is analyzed. Following a discussion of the non-credit programming offered in the SFCCD, the paper assesses the traumatic effect of the passage of Proposition 13 on the adult education programming in the District. Finally, the paper argues for the reversal of the trend favoring traditional programming over non-traditional education in the perennial battle for funding.
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COMMUNITY COLLEGE NONCREDIT PROGRAMMING:

THE TRACTABLE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE

BY

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DEAN

CITY COLLEGE OF SAN FRANCISCO

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"Have you noticed that the problems resulting from language differences are becoming greater with the dramatic increase of foreigners in our city. We need to help these people to speak and understand their new language so that they can be better understood and enjoy a better chance for economic survival. We can't afford to handicap our potential new citizens and workers by allowing their inability to communicate effectively to interfere with their full integration into our society."

This short monologue might be heard currently in any of our cities undergoing the impact of large numbers of Asian and/or Central and South American immigrants. John Swett, James Denman and others probably made similar observations when they saw the need for adult education English classes in San Francisco more than 125 years ago (California State Department of Education, 1957). Then it was the gold in the hills that drew the hordes; today, California's golden opportunities draw the masses. The language needs of many of our new immigrants, however, remain constant.

Thus was begun in California what was later to become one of the most efficient, effective educational systems ever developed.

Adult Education is not a recent concept. There are references to evening schools [adult education] in America as early as 1661 in New Amsterdam [New York] (Kempfer, 1955). The first adult lyceum was started in Millbury, Massachusetts in 1826 (Kempfer, 1955). However, California emerged as one of the leaders in this field when Ahira Holmes became principal of California's first evening school for adults in San Francisco in 1856 (California State Dept of Education, 1957).

Adult Education has been identified in many ways by many people. Euphemisms such as continuing education, community services, community education, postsecondary education and others have been appended in an attempt to lend an air of professionalism and make more palatable the concept of adult education to individuals who are psychologically conditioned to the more traditional organization of elementary,

secondary, and collegiate levels of formal education. The notion that education is not necessarily the result of a traditional set of learning activities conducted in a traditional classroom setting located in a traditional multi-classroom facility or ivy colored hallowed hall has not yet been fully accepted; nor has the "night school" characterization of adult schools yet fully disappeared. The old joke of the man who couldn't read in daylight because he learned reading at night school is still making the rounds. The thought by some that there is something academically or intellectually wrong with people who do not follow the time-honored education track from kindergarten through 12th grade has caused negative perceptions of both the individual who enrolled in adult education in order to continue his/her education and also for the adult education process which allows such individuals the chance to do so. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

The first adult classes in San Francisco, in California in fact, were held in the basement of St. Mary's Cathedral. Had early academicians been astute or perceptive enough, they would have immediately seen the enormous possibilities of a system of education that responded so well to individual needs while being conducted on an as-needed, where-needed basis. This, in contrast to traditional education which was, and continues to be, designed to respond to traditional needs, and generally offered in centralized physical facilities built in earlier, more stable times. Adult Education was, in the early days, in fact, an unrecognized futuristic model which "customized" or "tailored" instructional services to community identified current educational needs.

Through the subsequent years, adult education flourished and expanded within the limitations imposed by local educational entities and the amount of dollars available, generally in "left over" budget allocations. Typically, such programs included elementary subjects for adults (basic reading, composition, and arithmetic), high school subjects (allowing completion of high school at night). English for the foreign born, and citizenship.

Significant historical events which engulfed the U.S. and the world changed our society forever and contributed heavily to the development of adult education and the expansion of adult education programs and services. A substantial increase in demand for adult education began in the 1930's and exploded fully during World War II and period immediately following. The reasons for this phenomena at that time are fairly obvious: the depression, the post-depression upsurge in jobs and concomitant need for training, the wartime industry training needs, and the great need for education and training for our returning veterans and war industry workers

who didn't fit back in the high schools nor were they adequately prepared for college entry or jobs requiring prior training. Relatively easily available fiscal resources made adult education a viable response to the educational needs of such people during that critical period.

The expansion of adult education was a broad based move, and out of this rapid growth a new trend emerged: the expediency of using a variety of facilities not specifically designed for education. Many of the facilities chosen were being used for adult programs other than education, but which were in need of educational services to augment their activities.

Along with the development of public adult education programs, publicly supported and private nonprofit agencies began responding to special needs in the area of job training for the physically disabled, in social welfare counseling, and in answer to a myriad other calls for human services help from local communities.

These programs, recognizing the need for an educational component in order to achieve their training and service goals, were quick to recognize adult education as an available and suitable resource to their activities. Such programs, many of which were designed for the handicapped and senior citizens, were located wherever space was available: storefronts, warehouses, offices, surplus or old unused school buildings, industrial sites, etc. It may be surprising to learn that this type of facility utilization remains in effect in large measure today.

And so the concept of providing needed instruction for adults at any time in any place, including such unlikely settings as school basements, garages and storefronts have risen to the structural and organizational identity of a maverick educational delivery system which would stand neither on formality nor tradition. This nontraditional method of delivering educational services, wherever, whenever, and however possible has been the responsibility of a special group of dedicated educators whom I have chosen to label the "Alley Cats" of education.

This different breed of educator filled the instructional gaps uncovered during a discovery period of new adult educational needs and at a time when traditional education was busy doing its own thing. The astounding success of these instructors and this system was not anticipated, nor were the changes in store for continuing education accurately foreseen; however, even the most conservative of the traditionalists did not fail to recognize the effectiveness of the expanding adult programs, and they too began to utilize such services in order to augment and improve their own programs.

In 1946 a significant development in the field of education took place which impacted largely on the field of junior college or community college education which, in my opinion, was the college credit counterpart of adult education. Consequently its effects also had an important effect on adult continuing education's "Alley Cats", and postsecondary education in general. In July of that year, President Harry Truman created the "Commission on Higher Education".

The report produced by this Commission was to be a blueprint for the future of higher education in the United States. It was, indeed, comprehensive, and so involved in the role of two year colleges that it has been referred to by at least one writer as "the community Colleges' manifesto."⁴ The Truman Commission report paved the way for members of lower socio-economic groups, ethnic minorities, women, working adults and other educationally disadvantaged members of our society to gain access to education formerly denied them by prevailing circumstances. The two year colleges were identified as the logical service units to carry out the goals of the Commission within their communities. They were, by the nature of their relationship and physical locations within the communities which they served, clearly "community colleges", and the Commission labeled them as such. At a time when less than nine percent of the Blacks had completed high school and less than three percent had completed college,⁵ this attempt to provide universal access to postsecondary education could be considered nothing less than extraordinary.

Among the most important responsibilities of the community colleges as envisioned by the Truman Commission were the determination of community needs, the ability to deal with a broad cross section of the population, the integration of general and vocational-technical education, the provision of coursework for the first two years of

four year degree institutions, and the ability to serve as a center for a comprehensive program of adult education. In addition, attention was called by the Commission to the importance of such other skills as social sensitivity, artistic ability, and mechanical skills. Crucial to the concept of postsecondary education as a vehicle for the transition of people from their academic or vocational training to the mainstream of our society, is the following positions taken by the Commission: "Higher education in America should include a variety of institutional forms and educational program, so that at whatever point any student leaves school, he/she would be fitted, within the limits of mental capacity and educational level, for an abundant and productive life as a person, as a worker and as a citizen"⁴ (emphasis mine).

The Truman Commission report did much to call attention to the great need for expanded services at the postsecondary level, and in doing so, let impetus to what we in San Francisco were attempting to implement by building our existing continuing education programs. It was the beginning of a new thrust in the field, one which would assist in providing identity and visibility to a new institution in its developmental stages and undergoing the painful changes which usually accompany growth.

These "Alley Cats" of education have now successfully withstood the test of time in spite of severe legislative restrictions over the years and the horrendous negative fiscal fallout resulting from the passage of California's Proposition #13. The survival of this educational phenomena is largely the result of a wise decision by the voters of San Francisco to establish a community college district that would be responsible for the continuing education of individuals in college credit courses (City College) and in noncredit adult education (Community College Centers). Thus San Francisco's Adult Education Division was made a co-equal partner with City College of San Francisco to form the new San Francisco Community College District. This merger took place in 1970 under the State mandate for the establishment of separate Community College Districts from what had been previously unified or secondary districts.

The marriage of these two dissimilar delivery systems, geared primarily to young adult and/or older student needs, proved to be a productive one, and the result was a highly structured organization designed to provide each of the segments which serve the needs of postsecondary students the support needed. In the eyes of the traditionalists and other conservative educators, this consolidation made adult education in San Francisco an almost honorable profession.

The division of services in the San Francisco Community College District lies along the line separating college credit from noncredit courses (although noncredit courses may be, and frequently are, petitioned for college credit). The true value and benefits of this organization of educational delivery services are not readily discernible nor easily determined by the layperson; but to the professionals, aware of the complex problems involved in reaching students who are traditionally identified as drop-outs, difficult, or atypical, the enormous possibilities of such a dual system is seen as a rich resource. It provides an ideal environment in which to develop and implement new ideas serving the special needs of students, whose individual differences are such, that they must be served through appropriately designed instructional modes. This system offers more challenges to creative educator's imaginations than can currently be accommodated in terms of community continuing education services for adults or traditional college credit programs as we now know them.

The passage of Proposition #13 had taken its toll on San Francisco's Adult Education programs, and fallout continues to impact them traumatically, but they survive.

During the peak period of its development, the San Francisco Community College District which is comprised now of the Community College Centers and City College, developed into an institution which attempted to be all things to all people at the postsecondary educational level. College Credit courses were offered at City College of San Francisco on regular, traditional semester and summer session basis, and non-credit courses and programs were offered through the "Community College Centers" (the "Alley Cats") beginning and ending as the needs indicated.

The programs offered in City College included all of the traditional lower division college required courses for transfer to four year institutions, two year occupational and technical training programs, one year certificated courses, semi-professional courses, women's studies, ethnic studies, and an expanding curricula aimed at maintaining an up-to-date instructional program, including support services, in the college mode, as modified by the community college open door policy concept. The Community College Centers offered courses and programs ranging from Basic Education for the illiterate, semi-literate, functionally illiterate and/or educationally disadvantaged, and English as a second language, to such offerings as professional Allied Health programs and Computer Studies. These two institutions comprised a delivery system which was a comprehensive "state of the

art" in educational services and the resultant organization filled the vacuums that traditional education had ignored or failed to serve in its long history of educating the public. It was an open-entry, open-exit educational system that was committed to and carried out the concept of "cradle to grave" or "womb to tomb" learning, without regard for prior knowledge, economic station, race, sex, or any other factor except age (adult) and the ability to profit from the instruction. This system provided renewed hope for adults who suffered from the insecurity, tension, and anxiety of having once failed in an academic setting and developed an innate fear of a recurrence of such failure; it provided the means of improving one's economic bargaining position by offering skills improvement and upgrading courses to those seeking such help; the system provided entry level job training, leisure time creative activities, personal development resources instruction, and provided, as a fringe benefit, lonely adults an opportunity to meet and relate with other adults in similar straits. It was in fact, a process that provided services of personal, economic, and social benefit, sometimes therapeutic in nature, in the setting of an educational ambience.

This ideal system peaked in San Francisco about the time that the Downtown Community College Center was built. This center was to be the ultimate of an educational complex; the crowning jewel of the San Francisco Community College Centers Division; a vertical educational park providing university classes, community college credit classes, and community college adult noncredit classes and continuing education to anyone who could profit from the instruction. It was to be an appropriate metropolitan setting for an ideal comprehensive educational delivery system. In was 1978.

Alas! Proposition #13 at first slowed, and then reversed San Francisco's grand experiment. The "Alley Cats" that had developed into the "Best of Show" with the opening of the Downtown Community College Center were thrust into a slow downward spiral that, in most observers' opinions, has not yet reached bottom.

This great San Francisco experiment has turned into, through no fault of its own, a successful experiment that appears doomed to failure. This contradiction of terms has been brought about by the unparalleled success of an educational institution that met the needs of its host community as no other institution had before; however, in so doing, it had become reliant on, and an integral part of, the State Budget system which had itself become the victim of a dramatic shift of fiscal control.

The increased costs of the programs, which expanded so dramatically as a result of community demands, could no longer be met by local District revenues as had been the practice. New State level controls were imposed, and an immediate halt followed by a reversal of the previous unbridled growth of continuing education were the result. This tightening of controls over the State's 107 community colleges and their continuing education programs was not all bad; however a more selective budget cutting process with a concomitant provision for a long term funding base would have been a more responsible position for the Legislature to have taken. The repercussions of the new State budgeting process as a result of Proposition #13 are still being felt. As a consequence, in the perennial battle for funding the traditional have outstripped the nontraditional; the formal conservative social structures have once again been perceived as more deserving; academic and intellectual pursuits appear to have gained ground over the less academic skills training programs and semi-professional education in terms of available resources. This has been emphasized as fiscal resources have become increasingly scarce. The "Best of Show" are no longer the sleek, proud upstarts of the educational scene. They are struggling to hold their place in a State system that recognizes their need but will not provide adequate support; one that has slowly but surely begun to strangle the institution by removing its life's blood, money; one that now involves itself in the decision of whether or not a course is valuable enough to receive State support; and a State system that is slowly wresting the community colleges away from local control. Until this trend is reversed, if we fail to grasp the importance and relevance of present educational decisions on future generations - one of the great educational egalitarian movements will have been effectively stopped. The moment of truth appears to be at hand.

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